EXHIBIT 6

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Provisional Application

for

Controlling and manipulating groupings in a multi-zone music or media system

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Signed: / joe zheng /
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Controlling and manipulating groupings in a multi-zone music or media system

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to the area of consumer electronics, and more particularly, relates to techniques for controlling and manipulating groupings in a multi-zone music or media system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The detailed description of the invention, also in Appendix A and B, is presented largely in terms of procedures in terms of procedures, steps, logic blocks, processing, and other symbolic representations that directly or indirectly resemble the operations of data processing devices coupled to networks. These process descriptions and representations are typically used by those skilled in the art to most effectively convey the substance of their work to others skilled in the art. Numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will become obvious to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well known methods, procedures, components, and circuitry have not been described in detail to avoid unnecessarily obscuring aspects of the present invention.

Reference herein to "one embodiment" or "an embodiment" means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment can be included in at least one embodiment of the invention. The appearances of the phrase "in one embodiment" in various places in the specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment, nor are separate or alternative embodiments mutually exclusive of other embodiments. Further, the order of blocks in process flowcharts or diagrams representing one or more embodiments of the invention do not inherently indicate any particular order nor imply any limitations in the invention.

Referring now to the drawings, in which like numerals refer to like parts throughout the several views. FIG. 1 shows an exemplary configuration **100** in which the present invention may be practiced. The configuration may represent, but not be limited to, a part of a residential home, a business building or a complex with multiple zones. There are a number of multimedia players of which three examples **102**, **104** and **106** are shown as audio devices. Each of the audio devices may be installed or provided in one particular area or zone and hence referred to as a zone player herein.

As used herein, unless explicitly stated otherwise, an audio source or audio sources are in digital format and can be transported or streamed over a data network. To facilitate the understanding of the present invention, it is assumed that the configuration **100** represents a home. Thus, the zone player **102** and **104** may be located in two of the bedrooms respectively while the zone player **106** may be installed in a living room. All of the zone players **102**, **104** and **106** are coupled directly or indirectly

to a data network **108**. In addition, a computing device **110** is shown to be coupled on the network **108**. In reality, any other devices such as a home gateway device, a storage device, or an MP3 player may be coupled to the network **108** as well.

The network **108** may be a wired network, a wireless network or a combination of both. In one example, all devices including the zone players **102**, **104** and **106** are coupled to the network **108** by wireless means based on an industry standard such as IEEE 802.11. In yet another example, all devices including the zone players **102**, **104** and **106** are part of a local area network that communicates with a wide area network (e.g., the Internet).

Many devices on the network **108** are configured to download and store audio sources. For example, the computing device **110** can download audio sources from the Internet and store the downloaded sources locally for sharing with other devices on the Internet or the network **108**. The computing device **110** or any of the zone players can also be configured to receive streaming audio. Shown as a stereo system, the device **112** is configured to receive an analog audio source (e.g., from broadcasting) or retrieve a digital audio source (e.g., from a compact disk). The analog audio sources can be converted to digital audio sources. In accordance with the present invention, the audio source may be shared among the devices on the network **108**.

Two or more zone players may be grouped together to form a new zone group. Any combinations of zone players and an existing zone group may be grouped together. In one instance, a new zone group is

formed by adding one zone player to another zone player or an existing zone group.

Referring now to FIG. 2A, there is shown an exemplary functional block diagram of a zone player **200** in accordance with the present invention. The zone player **200** includes a network interface **202**, a processor **204**, a memory **206**, an audio processing circuit **210**, a digital signal processing module **212**, and optionally, an audio amplifier **214** that may be internal or external. The network interface **202** facilitates a data flow between a data network (i.e., the data network **108** of FIG. 1) and the zone player **200** and typically executes a special set of rules (i.e., a protocol) to send data back and forth. One of the common protocols used in the Internet is TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol). In general, a network interface manages the assembling of an audio source or file into smaller packets that are transmitted over the data network or reassembles received packets into the original source or file. In addition, the network interface **202** handles the address part of each packet so that it gets to the right destination or intercepts packets destined for the zone player **200**.

The network interface **202** may include one or both of a wireless interface **216** and a wired interface **217**. The wireless interface **216**, also referred to as a RF interface, provides network interface functions by a wireless means for the zone player **200** to communicate with other devices in accordance with a communication protocol (such as the wireless standard IEEE 802.11a, 802.11b or 802.11g). The wired interface **217** provides network interface functions by a wired means (e.g., an Ethernet cable). In one embodiment, a zone player includes both of the

interfaces **216** and **217**, and other zone players include only a RF or wired interface. Thus these other zone players communicate with other devices on a network or retrieve audio sources via the zone player. The processor **204** is configured to control the operation of other parts in the zone player **200**. The memory **206** may be loaded with one or more software modules that can be executed by the processor **204** to achieve desired tasks. According to one aspect of the present invention, a software module implementing one embodiment of the present invention is executed, the processor **204** operates in accordance with the software module in reference to a saved zone group configuration characterizing a zone group created by a user, the zone player **200** is caused to retrieve an audio source from another zone player or a device on the network.

According to one embodiment of the present invention, the memory **206** is used to save one or more saved zone configuration files that may be retrieved for modification at any time. Typically, a saved zone group configuration file is transmitted to a controller (e.g., the controlling device **140** or **142** of FIG. 1, a computer, a portable device, or a TV) when a user operates the controlling device. The zone group configuration provides an interactive user interface so that various manipulations or control of the zone players may be performed.

The audio processing circuit **210** resembles most of the circuitry in an audio playback device and includes one or more digital-to-analog converters (DAC), an audio preprocessing part, an audio enhancement part or a digital signal processor and others. In operation, when an audio source is retrieved via the network interface **202**, the audio source is processed in the audio processing circuit **210** to produce analog audio

signals. The processed analog audio signals are then provided to the audio amplifier **214** for playback on speakers. In addition, the audio processing circuit **210** may include necessary circuitry to process analog signals as inputs to produce digital signals for sharing with other devices on a network.

Depending on an exact implementation, the digital signal processing module **212** may be implemented within the audio processing circuit **210** or as a combination of hardware and software. The audio amplifier **214** is typically an analog circuit that powers the provided analog audio signals to drive one or more speakers.

Referring now to FIG. 2B, there is shown an example of a controller **240**, which may correspond to the controlling device **140** or **142** of FIG. 1. The controller **240** may be used to facilitate the control of multi-media applications, automation and others in a complex. In particular, the controller **240** is configured to facilitate a selection of a plurality of audio sources available on the network, controlling operations of one or more zone players (e.g., the zone player **200**) through a RF interface corresponding to the RF interface **216** of FIG. 2A. According to one embodiment, the wireless means is based on an industry standard (e.g., infrared, radio, wireless standard IEEE 802.11a, 802.11b or 802.11g). When a particular audio source is being played in the zone player **200**, a picture, if there is any, associated with the audio source may be transmitted from the zone player **200** to the controller **240** for display. In one embodiment, the controller **240** is used to synchronize more than one zone players by grouping the zone players in a group. In another

embodiment, the controller **240** is used to control the volume of each of the zone players in a zone group individually or together.

The user interface for the controller **240** includes a screen **242** (e.g., a LCD screen) and a set of functional buttons as follows: a "zones" button **244**, a "back" button **246**, a "music" button **248**, a scroll wheel **250**, "ok" button **252**, a set of transport control buttons **254**, a mute button **262**, a volume up/down button **264**, a set of soft buttons **266** corresponding to the labels **268** displayed on the screen **242**.

The screen **242** displays various screen menus in response to a user's selection. In one embodiment, the "zones" button **244** activates a zone management screen or "Zone Menu", which is described in more details below. The "back" button **246** may lead to different actions depending on the current screen. In one embodiment, the "back" button triggers the current screen display to go back to a previous one. In another embodiment, the 'back" button negates the user's erroneous selection. The "music" button **248** activates a music menu, which allows the selection of an audio source (e.g., a song) to be added to a zone player's music queue for playback.

The scroll wheel **250** is used for selecting an item within a list, whenever a list is presented on the screen **242**. When the items in the list are too many to be accommodated in one screen display, a scroll indicator such as a scroll bar or a scroll arrow is displayed beside the list. When the scroll indicator is displayed, a user may rotate the scroll wheel **250** to either choose a displayed item or display a hidden item in the list. The "ok" button **252** is used to confirm the user selection on the screen **242**.

There are three transport buttons **254**, which are used to control the effect of the currently playing song. For example, the functions of the transport buttons may include play/pause and forward/rewind a song, move forward to a next song track, or move backward to a previous track. According to one embodiment, pressing one of the volume control buttons such as the mute button **262** or the volume up/down button **264** activates a volume panel. In addition, there are three soft buttons **266** that can be activated in accordance with the labels **268** on the screen **242**. It can be understood that, in a multi-zone system, there may be multiple audio sources being played respectively in more than one zone players. The music transport functions described herein shall apply selectively to one of the sources when a corresponding one of the zone players or zone groups is selected.

FIG. 2C illustrates an internal functional block diagram of an exemplary controller **270**, which may correspond to the controller **240** of FIG. 2B. The screen **272** on the controller **270** may be a LCD screen. The screen **272** communicates with and is commanded by a screen driver **274** that is controlled by a microcontroller (e.g., a processor) **276**. The memory **282** may be loaded with one or more application modules **284** that can be executed by the microcontroller **276** with or without a user input via the user interface **278** to achieve desired tasks. In one embodiment, an application module is configured to facilitate grouping a number of selected zone players into a zone group and synchronizing the zone players for one audio source. In another embodiment, an application module is configured to control together the audio volumes of the zone players in a zone group. In operation, when the microcontroller **276**

executes one of the application modules **284**, the screen driver **274** generates control signals to drive the screen **272** to display an application specific user interface accordingly, more of which will be described below.

The controller **270** includes a network interface **280** referred to as a RF interface **280** that facilitates wireless communication with a zone player via a corresponding RF interface thereof. In one embodiment, the commands such as volume control and audio playback synchronization are sent via the RF interfaces. In another embodiment, a saved zone group configuration is transmitted between a zone player and a controller via the RF interfaces. The controller **270** may control one or more zone players, such as **102**, **104** and **106** of FIG. 1. Nevertheless, there may be more than one controllers, each preferably in a zone (e.g., a room) and configured to control any one and all of the zone players.

In one embodiment, a user creates a zone group including at least two zone players from the controller **240** that sends signals or data to one of the zone players. As all the zone players are coupled on a network, the received signals in one zone players can cause other zone players in the group to be synchronized so that all the zone players in the group playback an identical audio source or a list of identical audio sources in a timely synchronized manner. Similarly, when a user increases the audio volume of the group from the controller, the signals or data of increasing the audio volume for the group are sent to one of the zone players and causes other zone players in the group to be increased together in volume and in scale.

According to one implementation, an application module is loaded in memory **282** for zone group management. When a predetermined key (e.g. the "zones" button **244**) is activated on the controller **240**, the application module is executed in the microcontroller **276**. The input interface **278** coupled to and controlled by the microcontroller **276** receives inputs from a user. A "Zone Menu" is then displayed on the screen **272**. The user may start grouping zone players into a zone group by activating a "Link Zones" or "Add Zone" soft button, or de-grouping a zone group by activating an "Unlink Zones" or "Drop Zone" button. The detail of the zone group manipulation will be further discussed below.

As described above, the input interface **278** includes a number of function buttons as well as a screen graphical user interface. It should be pointed out that the controller **240** in FIG. 2B is not the only controlling device that may practice the present invention. Other devices that provide the equivalent control functions (e.g., a computing device, a hand-held device) may also be configured to practice the present invention. In the above description, unless otherwise specifically described, it is clear that keys or buttons are generally referred to as either the physical buttons or soft buttons, enabling a user to enter a command or data.

One mechanism for 'joining' zone players together for music playback is to link a number of zone players together to form a group. To link a number of zone players together, a user may manually link each zone player or room one after the other. For example, there is a multi-zone system that includes the following zones.

- Bathroom
- Bedroom

- Den
- Dining Room
- Family Room
- Foyer

If the user wishes to link 5 of the 6 zone players using the current mechanism, he/she must start with a single zone and then manually link each zone to that zone. This mechanism may be sometimes quite consuming.

According to one embodiment, a set of zones can be dynamically linked together using one command. Using what is referred to as a zone scene or scene, zones can be configured in a particular scene (e.g., morning, afternoon, or garden), where a predefined zone grouping and setting of attributes in for the grouping are determined.

For instance, a "Morning" zone scene/configuration command would link the Bedroom, Den and Dining Room together in one action. Without this single command, the user would need to manually and individually link each zone. FIG. 3 provides an illustration of one zone scene, where the left column shows the starting zone grouping – all zones are separate, the column on the right shows the effects of grouping the zones to make a group of 3 zones.

Expanding this idea further, the Zone Scene can be set to create multiple sets of linked zones. For example the "Morning Mode" scene would create 3 separate groups of zones, the downstairs zones would be linked together, the upstairs zones would be linked together in their own

group, and the outside zones (in this case the patio) would move into a group of its own.

Optionally, a system may be supplied with a command that links all zones in one step. This may be a simple form of a zone scene. In one embodiment that extends to more than just linking zones together. After linking the appropriate zones, a zone scene command could apply the following attributes:

1. Set volumes levels in each zones (each zone can have a different volume)
2. Mute/Unmute zones.
3. Select and play specific music in the zones.
4. Set the play mode of the music (Shuffle, Repeat, Shuffle-repeat)
5. Set the music playback equalization of each zone (bass treble) etc.

A further extension of this embodiment is to trigger a zone scene command as an alarm clock function. For instance the zone Scene is set to apply at 8:00am. It could link appropriate zones automatically, set specific music to play and then stop the music after a defined duration.

Annexed hereto is an Appendix A providing examples to teach and refer to various features, detailed designs, uses, advantages, configurations and characteristics in one embodiment of the present invention.

Annexed hereto is also an Appendix B providing examples to teach and refer to various features, detailed designs, uses, advantages,

configurations and characteristics using clock in one embodiment of the present invention.

One of the features in the present invention is to allow sets of related devices (controllers and operating components) to exist as a group without interfering with other components that are potentially visible on the same wired or wireless network.

The processes, sequences or steps and features discussed above and in the appendixes are related to each other and each is believed independently novel in the art. The disclosed processes and sequences may be performed alone or in any combination to provide a novel and unobvious system or a portion of a system. It should be understood that the processes and sequences in combination yield an equally independently novel combination as well, even if combined in their broadest sense; i.e. with less than the specific manner in which each of the processes or sequences has been reduced to practice in the attached appendix.

The forgoing and attached are illustrative of various aspects/embodiments of the present invention, the disclosure of specific sequence/steps and the inclusion of specifics with regard to broader methods and systems are not intended to limit the scope of the invention which finds itself in the various permutations of the features disclosed and described herein as conveyed to one of skill in the art.

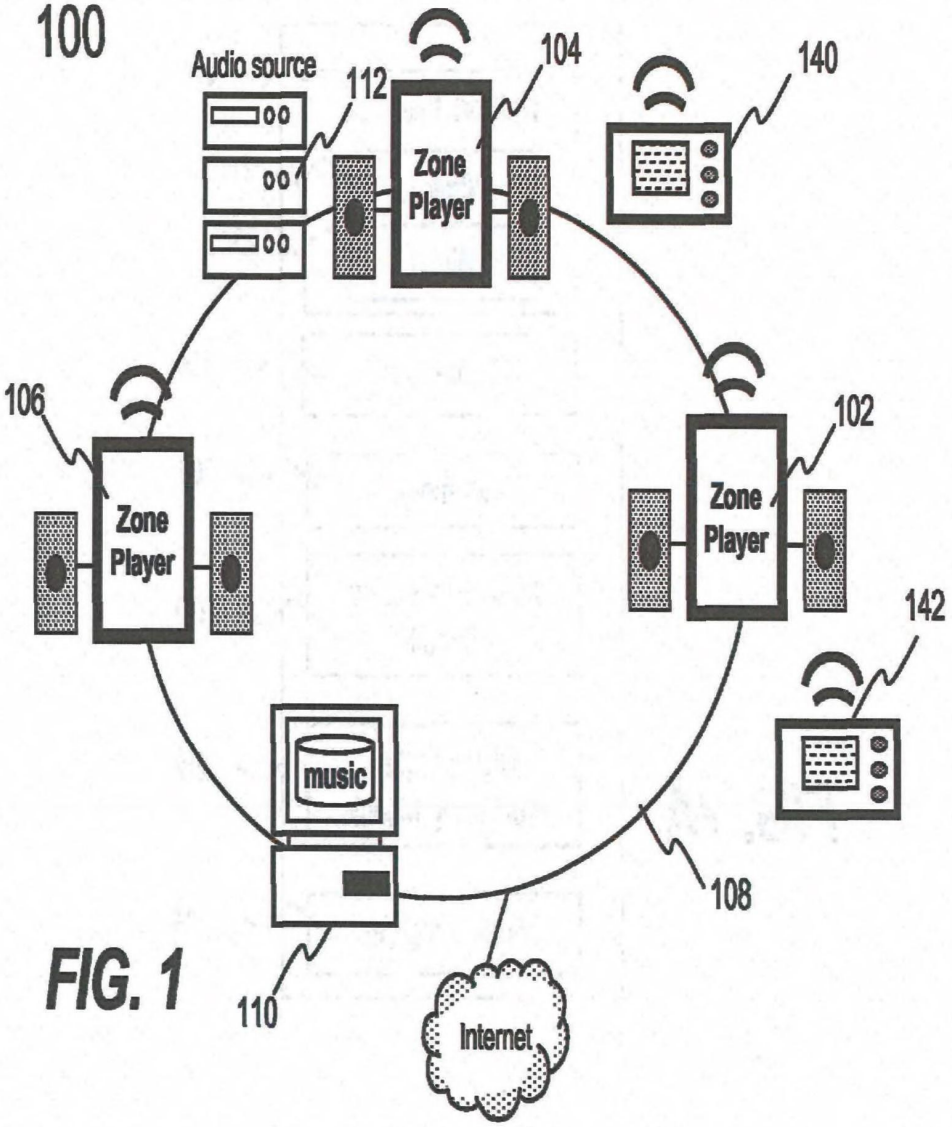
100
Audio source
112
104
140
Zone Player
106
Zone Player
102
Zone Player
142
music
108
110
Internet

FIG. 1

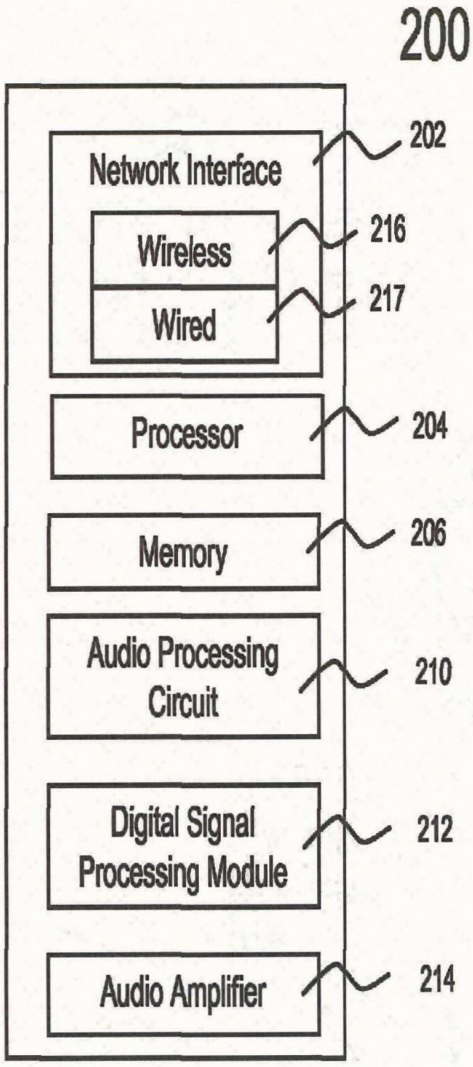

FIG. 2A

SONDM000018707

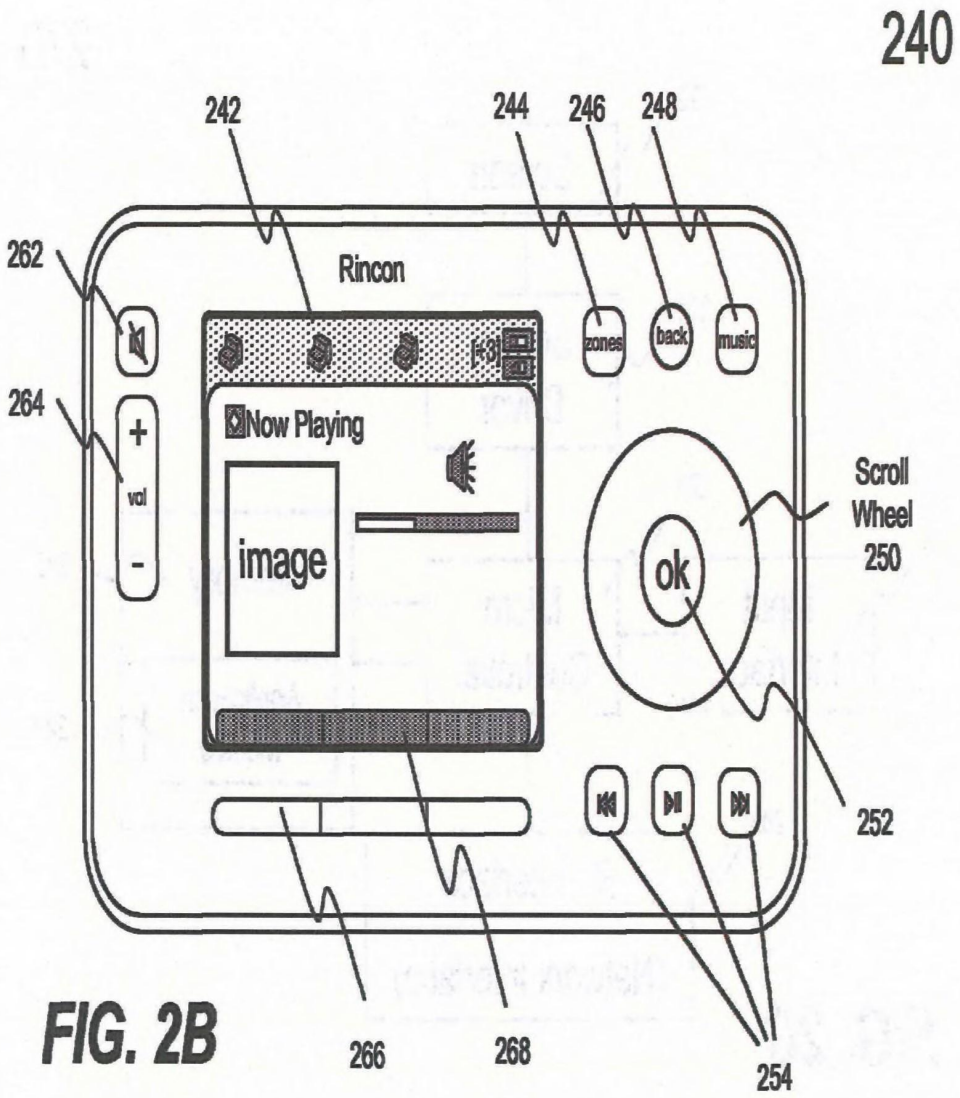
240
242
244
246
248
262
Rincon
zones
back
music
264
Now Playing
vol
image
Scroll
Wheel
250
ok
252
266
268
254

FIG. 2B

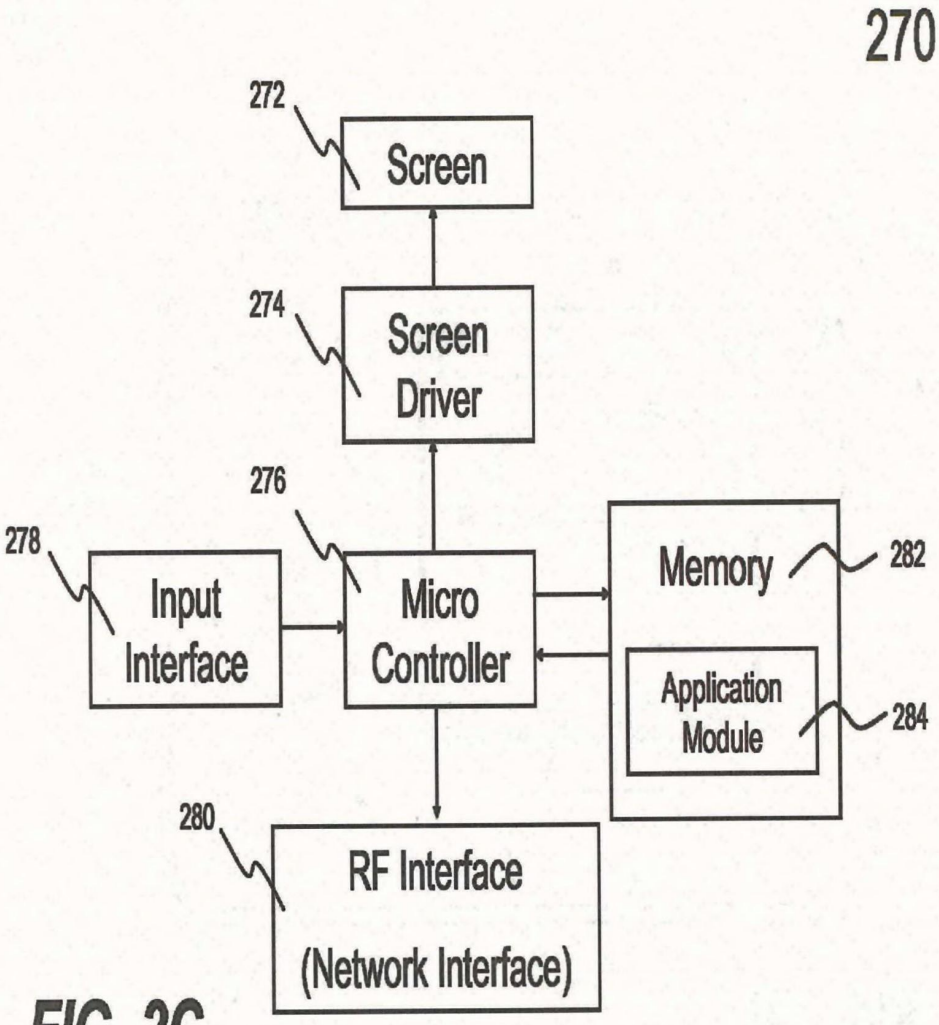
270
272
Screen
274
Screen Driver
276
278
Input Interface
Micro Controller
Memory
282
Application Module
284
280
RF Interface
(Network Interface)

FIG. 2C

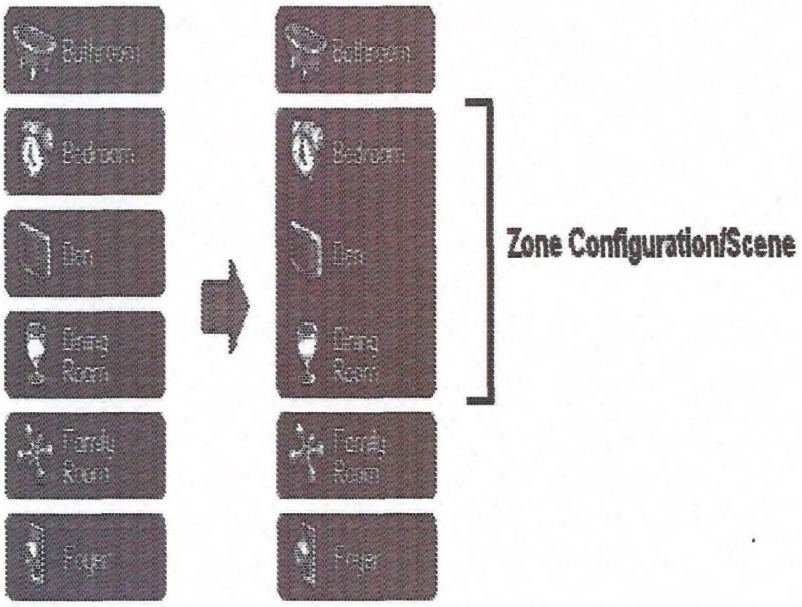

FIG. 3

SONDM000018710